

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

February 12, 1969

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger *K*

SUBJECT: Diplomatic Courses of Action - Cambodia

At Tab A is a memo from Bill Rogers discussing the issue of resuming diplomatic relations with Cambodia. He recommends that you authorize:

1. a personal letter from you to Sihanouk indicating your desire for improved relations with Cambodia. (A redraft of State's proposed letter is at Tab B.)

2. a follow-up message to Sihanouk, through Australian channels, indicating that we are considering issuing a border declaration recognizing the "sovereignty, independence, neutrality and territorial integrity" of Cambodia (Tab C).

There are both advantages and disadvantages to this procedure. Briefly, the advantages are:

-- it commits us to little, avoids involving you personally in the mechanics of resuming relations, and permits us to pull back at any stage should Sihanouk prove unresponsive;

-- a resumption of relations (or even an improvement in relations) would be construed by some as a clear sign that Sihanouk believes we may come out on top in the Vietnam war;

-- some form of diplomatic relations would make it easier for us to communicate with the Cambodians;

-- U.S. representation would give us some intelligence and information gains.

DOS, OSD, JCS  
reviews complete

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-2-

The disadvantages are:

-- a visible pursuit of better relations with Cambodia would complicate any formal expansion of the authority our forces now have to act along the Cambodian border;


-- U. S. diplomatic representatives in Cambodia, should we resume relations, might experience some indignities. Sihanouk would almost certainly feel bound to denounce us from time to time, and might even be tempted to act physically against our representatives. (Sihanouk, however, has assured the French Ambassador that we would not treat our representatives as "hostages.")

The Defense Department and Joint Chiefs argue (Tab D) that before we take any diplomatic action, we should review all other possible actions -- including increased military operations. (At the present time, U. S. forces are authorized to conduct only limited reconnaissance missions into Cambodia and -- in emergency situations -- to take necessary counteractions in the exercise of the right of self-defense. The Joint Chiefs are now studying additional possible military operations directed against North Vietnamese sanctuary in Cambodia.)

On balance, I recommend that you approve the proposed course of action. The advantages listed above substantially outweigh the disadvantages. Basically, Sihanouk's actions will be determined by his assessment of who is going to win. The margin of influencing him directly is therefore fairly small. However, there is a certain advantage in positioning ourselves properly. Should we decide to step up military action against the North Vietnamese in Cambodia, our case will be strengthened if we can demonstrate that at the outset of your Administration you sought an improvement in relations. In general, it is better to be tough from a posture of conciliation than from one of petulance.


Recommendations:

1. That you approve the draft letter to Sihanouk at Tab B.

Approved 

Disapproved \_\_\_\_\_

2. That you approve the message to be sent through the Australian Ambassador (Tab C).

Approved 

Disapproved \_\_\_\_\_